



**State of Wisconsin**  
**Department of Public Instruction**  
Elizabeth Burmaster, State Superintendent

---

\*\*\*\*STATE OF EDUCATION ADDRESS\*\*\*\*

State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster

State Capitol Rotunda  
*September 21, 2006*

Thank you. Eric Lee is our Boys' State Superintendent, and he is a student at Homestead High School. Thank you, Eric, for that kind introduction.

Thank you to the Stoughton Brass Quintet, under the direction of Craig Mason. The Stoughton community and Superintendent Mary Gavigan have a lot to be proud of.

Thank you Jonathan Overby for your inspiring national anthem, and Kristi Anderson of Wisconsin Rapids High School, our Girls' State Superintendent, for our *Pledge of Allegiance*.

First Lady Jessica Doyle, you are truly a champion for public education, and we thank you for all you do.

We recognize the excellent team directors and all the staff at the Department of Public Instruction, the CESAs, WEAC, and AFT-Wisconsin; district administrators; Presidents Reilly, Clancy, and Wegenke, who lead our institutions of higher education and are with us today; and the many individuals and organizations in this state who support education.

Former State Superintendent Barbara Thompson, Supreme Court justices, legislators, school board members, and all elected officials who are present, we thank you for your public service.

I am honored to serve as your elected state superintendent, and it is a privilege to report on the state of public education in Wisconsin.

From establishing our country's first kindergarten over 150 years ago, to nation leading performance on college admission tests **this** year, Wisconsin has had a long tradition of quality public education.

Our students have been among the most successful in the nation for the past century, but we are at a crossroads.

Public education in Wisconsin is threatened. From our largest urban to our smallest rural school districts, there is a rising inequity in educational opportunity for our children.

Our 20 standards establish in law what constitutes quality educational opportunities and equity for students across our state from requiring licensed educators, school counseling, nursing, and library services, to health, art, physical, and music education.

But, today, we know that districts throughout the state are less able to meet those 20 standards, and quality education in Wisconsin has been compromised.

(more)

---

Districts, especially in our urban and rural areas, have been closing schools, cutting programs, and eliminating services. Educational opportunities for students are being limited at the same time we are increasing accountability for student achievement.

Fourteen years of state imposed revenue caps have impacted the capacity of all districts, especially those with declining enrollment. School boards, our locally elected education leaders, have held over 220 referenda to exceed the revenue caps in the past four years with less than half of them successful. The cumulative effects of revenue caps are reaching into the classroom, impacting educational opportunities. Last year's annual survey of school district superintendents reports:

- 70 percent of our 425 districts increased class size,
- 65 percent increased student fees,
- over 60 percent offered fewer courses and reduced programs for gifted and talented students,
- over 65 percent laid off teachers and support staff, and
- over half of our school districts reduced extracurricular programs and programs for at-risk students.

Operational costs continue to rise for all districts with fuel costs resulting in higher transportation, power, and heating bills.

The local costs of federal mandates, including increased data collection and testing under No Child Left Behind, have exceeded federal funding.

Over the past 10 years, the number of children living in poverty, receiving free or reduced-price lunch, has risen to 31 percent statewide. The percentage of students on free or reduced-price lunch is 72 percent in Milwaukee; Beloit, 57 percent; and Green Bay, 43 percent. But this is not just an urban issue, poverty is increasing in rural school districts. Siren has 60 percent of its students receiving free and reduced-price lunch; Glidden, 63 percent; and Bayfield, 66 percent. And, according to current U.S. Census data, 84,000 Wisconsin children are living in extreme poverty, that's a family of four earning at or below \$10,000 a year.

Our educators and communities are working hard to increase achievement of all students and close the gap between economically disadvantaged students, students of color, and their peers. We have the will and the proven ability to succeed.

However, increased costs, increased poverty, and, most of all, revenue caps are limiting our ability to offer all children the same educational opportunities across our state. Increasingly, it does matter where you live in our state as to the educational opportunities your child receives.

Those who continue to lead people to believe that public education costs too much, must be called to answer, "What is the cost of failing to prepare every child for the 21st century? Are we going to continue to compromise educational opportunities for children based on where they live in the state or their family income?"

The single best investment we can make is in our children. Educated children become educated adults, who participate in the social, economic, and civic life of their community. If our state is to be competitive, we must invest in our human capital and ensure that our students pursue rigorous study.

Gov. Doyle's Grow Wisconsin plan, Kid's First initiative and Wisconsin Covenant, the UW System's Growth Agenda and the efforts of the Wisconsin technical colleges and independent colleges and universities are all committed to public education as the foundation of democracy and economic security in an increasingly competitive global economy.

---

In the 21st century, our high school graduates need to be critical thinkers, problem solvers, innovators, and effective communicators. So, today, our students must engage in rigorous and relevant coursework. Students need to be technologically proficient, globally aware, civically engaged, and financially and economically literate. We need to have high standards to remain competitive and technologically advanced.

We are at a crossroads. Our students' educational opportunities need not be threatened. The solutions are at hand. Together, in partnership we can do what is right.

We can bring more of our best, brightest, and most experienced teachers to our children of greatest need.

Today, through my budget proposal, I issue a call to action and service to all experienced, master educators in Wisconsin.

Teach in our high-needs schools, especially in Milwaukee and small, rural communities, and we will pay you an additional \$5,000 dollars for nine years for meeting the challenge and shepherding our most precious resource, our children. You will provide a vital service for the public good, and you will grow as an educator and as a person.

My budget would also expand global literacy and our state's economic competitiveness through funding for elementary world language instruction; advanced science, technology, engineering, and mathematics courses; and career and employability skills assessment and counseling.

My budget would support our rural schools, libraries, and communities as they struggle with declining enrollment, rapidly rising property values, and revenue caps. I will submit a sparsity aid proposal of \$26 million for small, rural districts. I also propose assistance for declining enrollment districts and expanded transportation aid to further assist all districts.

To lessen the threat to education in Milwaukee, our largest city, I propose grants to extend the school year throughout the summer, funding to restore arts education, and my budget proposes to change the current state funding of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, helping Milwaukee taxpayers and the public schools.

I propose we continue to support and expand what we know works throughout our state:

- the SAGE program,
- special education categorical aid,
- bilingual-bicultural aid,
- school nutrition programs, including school breakfast,
- public libraries, and
- 4-year-old kindergarten.

And, the devoted professionals who educate our children every day deserve no less than the repeal of the QEO.

With Gov. Doyle's leadership, we have been able to return to two-thirds state funding, and we must continue to honor our pledge to citizens, communities, and schools. We must continue this bipartisan commitment of two-thirds state funding as long as revenue caps continue.

My biennial budget proposals work to lessen the threat to equity in educational opportunities for students across our state and ensure continued high-quality public education in the 21st century.

The courage of educators, parents, students, and our communities is always apparent in Wisconsin as we face the threats head on, guided by undaunting hope and belief in our children.

---

But without the support of statewide resources and strong local partnerships at this critical crossroads, the odds are against too many of our children.

The experiences of our children in school today will shape their character, decisions, and quality of life as Americans in the world. If we are to remain as world leaders, the experiences of our children today must inspire them that peace and prosperity are attainable in their own lives, in their own Wisconsin communities, and throughout the world.

We must move public education forward into the 21st century. We must come together, answering the call to service and sustaining the hopes and dreams of our children.

Together we can make our schools work for all children, where ever they may live, in our great state of Wisconsin.

---

*Elizabeth Burmaster is the elected state superintendent of public instruction.*

**NOTES:** The state superintendent's new photo is available for download on the web. A high resolution photo is available on the Department of Public Instruction "Media Contacts and Resources" webpage at < <http://dpi.wisconsin.gov/eis/vm-media.html> >.

The text of the State of Education Address is available electronically at < [http://www.dpi.wi.gov/eis/pdf/dpi2006\\_112.pdf](http://www.dpi.wi.gov/eis/pdf/dpi2006_112.pdf) >.